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AUTHOR Donovan, Mary Ann  
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## ABSTRACT

A nationwide survey of private sector employers elicited information on the level of business interest in various vocational educational services and programs. It also provided insight into how business can and does contribute to vocational education. Nearly all employers (94 percent of the 262 who returned questionnaires) indicated some interest in at least one of the vocational education services listed on the questionnaire. Activities perceived to be of greatest value were offering skill training for a specific occupational area, recruiting qualified permanent personnel, providing vocational training for employees, and training to improve managers' supervisory techniques. Nearly 9 of every 10 employers indicated a willingness to contribute by using company resources to support vocational education. Respondents would consider participating in local review committees, plant tours, work/study or cooperative education programs, and loaning of executives or instructors. Two-thirds of the respondents recruited employees from the vocational education system. Those who did not recruit cited these reasons: lack of hiring by company, insufficient training of graduates, and a ready supply of experienced workers. Over half of the respondents (58 percent) had a training arrangement with vocational education institutions. Most commonly, employers used vocational education for occupationally specific or technical training. (The questionnaire is appended.) (YLB)

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Findings on Employer/Vocational  
Education Survey

by

Mary Ann Donovan

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## FINDINGS ON EMPLOYER/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SURVEY

### Introduction

The Center for Vocational Education-Business Cooperation recently completed a nationwide survey of private sector employers designed to elicit information on the level of business interest in various vocational educational services and programs as well as to gain insight into how business can and does contribute to vocational education.<sup>1</sup> The project's primary purpose was to provide a mechanism for increasing the exchange of information between state vocational education directors and local employers by providing each state director with copies of the questionnaires completed by employers in their respective state. Such data would not only provide the state directors with basic information about employers' experiences, but would also provide state officials with information that would facilitate their contact with those employers who participated in the project. (Each state director would follow-up with each of the individual respondents by contacting them directly.)

Even though the project was not intended to and does not provide a statistically reliable database of employer involvement with the vocational education system, a summary of the survey results does provide a limited profile on a nationwide sample. This paper details the survey responses in the aggregate and is based on 262 completed questionnaires. (A slightly larger number of questionnaires was actually received by NAB (285); however, only 262 returns were received prior to the tabulation of these data.)

### Methodology

The survey and an informational brochure entitled: Vocational Education and Business: A Partnership that Works, was distributed in late November and early December of 1985 to over 5000 individuals:

- 1,000 members of the National Tooling and Machining Association;
- 3,400 businessmen employed in corporations that the National Alliance of Business maintains communication with for participation in summer youth campaigns and for organizational support; and,
- Three hundred executives of local chambers of commerce, each of whom was asked to distribute the survey to ten of their members.

The questionnaire covered four subject areas: level of interest in various education and training services offered through vocational education; willingness to work with or contribute to vocational education; use of the vocational education system as a source of recruitment for future employees; and, use of vocational education to provide training, education or related services to the company. Basic information about the respondent's position in the company as well as profile information about the respondent's firm was also solicited. The majority of the questions were designed to have multiple, coded responses from which the business people could select. (A copy of the questionnaire is attached to the end of this report.)

### Employer Profile

Employers who responded to the survey represented companies of all sizes; however the majority of them were from small and medium sized firms (i.e., companies with fewer than 500 workers). In fact, 14 percent of the respondents worked for firms with fewer than 10 employees, and over two fifths of the respondents (42%) represented private industries employing less than fifty people. Furthermore, two-thirds of those completing the questionnaire were from companies with fewer than 500 employees. Thus, one-third of the respondents who returned the questionnaire were employed by companies having more than 500 workers. The majority of these (22% of all respondents) were from firms employing more than 5000 workers. ( See figure 1 )

1.) The Center is a joint initiative of the National Vocational Education Professional Development Consortium and the National Alliance of Business. Its purpose is to promote the image and enhance the development of the vocational education system by building stronger working relationships between employers and vocational education administrators. The Center began operation in June 1985 and is housed at and staffed by the National Alliance of Business.

2.) Five percent of the completed surveys did not identify type of company or position held by the respondent in his firm.

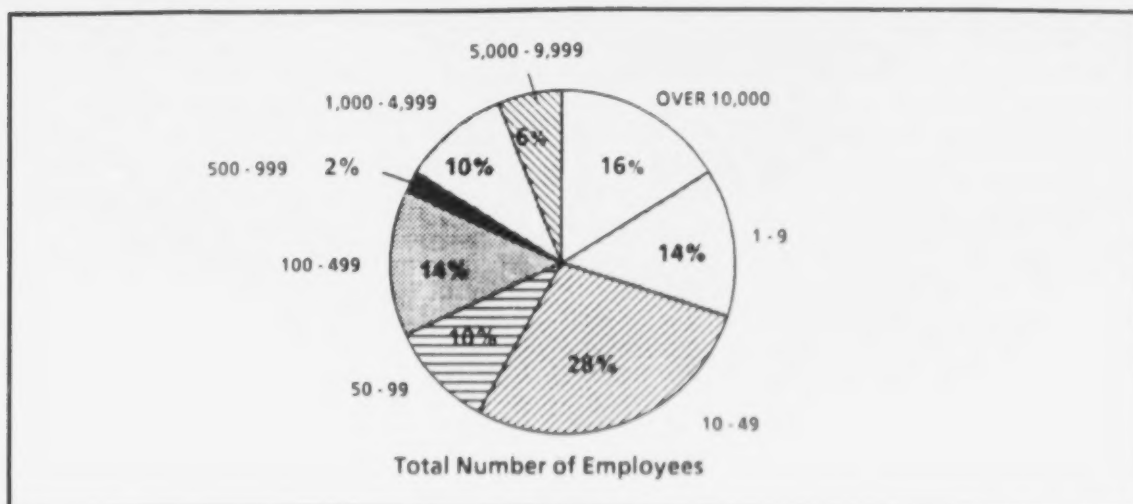


Figure I

For those companies with fewer than 500 workers the questionnaire was usually completed by presidents or chief executive officers for the firm. The staff person for human resources, personnel, education, employment, training, or affirmative action generally took responsibility for filling out and returning the survey for those firms employing more than 500 workers.<sup>2</sup>

Respondents' firms represented the full range of industries in the United States. Using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system, all major industries are represented with the largest number of respondents coming from the manufacturing sector (55%). As might be expected, respondents representing the larger firms tended to come from this sector. The service industry is the second largest sector represented by the respondents' firms (14%). No other sector is represented by more than 10 percent of the respondents. See figure II.

## Summary of Results

### I. Employer Level of Interest in or Use of Vocational Education Programs

The questionnaire listed fourteen activities that are offered through the vocational education system that were considered to be potential resources to employers. Respondents were asked to rank their level of interest in or current use of these activities according to four categories: "very interested," "somewhat interested," "currently using," or "not relevant."

Nearly all employers (94%) indicated some degree of interest in at least one of the vocational education services listed - the average respondent listed seven or eight of the activities as of being of interest or currently using. To identify those activities which are perceived to be of the greatest value to the respondents, the number of responses to "very interested," "somewhat interested," and "currently using" were combined to reach an overall positive rating <sup>3</sup>. At least seventy percent of the respondents rated the following activities positively:

<sup>3</sup> ) Frequently the responses to this question indicate a high "interest" level but a "low" usage level. This may be primarily the result of respondents checking off the "very interested" or "somewhat interested" category even if they are currently using the service listed. (Respondents were limited to one response.) Thus the most useful data results from combining the information according to positive responses.

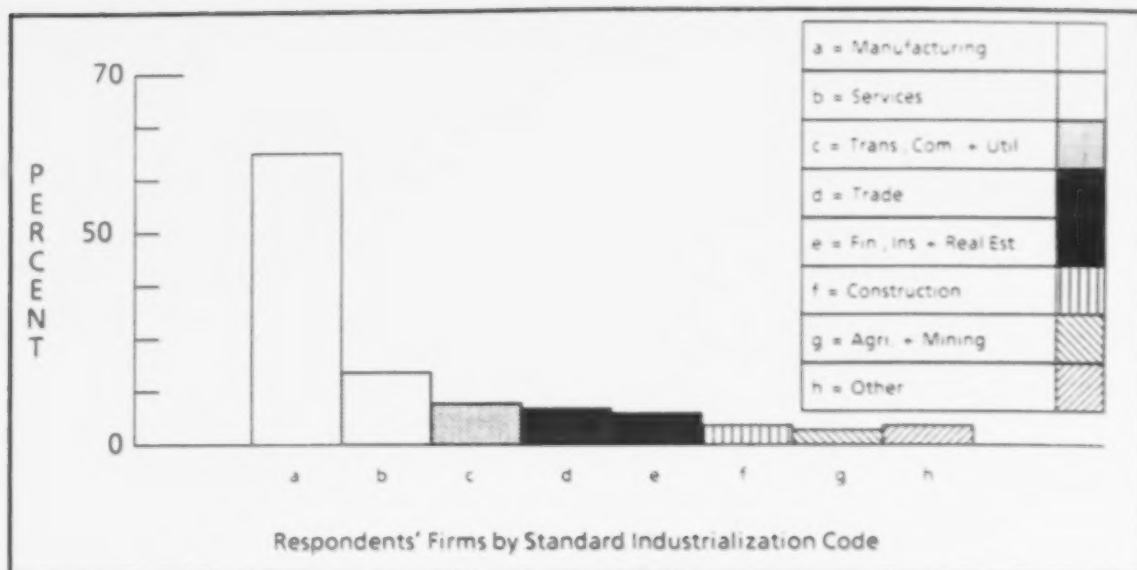


Figure II

- The offering of skill training for a specific occupational area at a vocational education institution - 94%;
- The recruitment of qualified permanent personnel for the employer's labor force - 81%;
- The provision of vocational training for employees to upgrade skills, produce new products, or offer new services - 78%;
- The provision of training geared to improving managers' supervisory techniques - 74%;
- The offering of training designed for a particular company and provided at the employer's worksite - 70%; and
- The provision of training for high demand occupations - 70%.

Conversely, there were four activities or services that are available to employers through the vocational education system for which the respondents showed less need for or interest in:

- Specialized training to meet federal and state licensing requirements - 63% were not interested;
- Business management assistance - 60% were not interested;
- Counseling to help employees adjust to new production techniques or requirements - 60% were not interested; and
- Skill training for expansion or relocation - 57% were not interested.

Probably the most surprising response was the general lack of interest in utilizing the vocational education system as a mechanism for assisting in company expansion or relocation. This may be due to the over-representation by small business in the sample of respondents. It is less likely that these employers with limited workforces expect to expand significantly or relocate. Also, several of the large employers indicated they they were not currently in a hiring or expanding mode due to economic conditions.

## II. Employer Willingness to Work With Vocational Education

Fourteen separate activities were listed as examples of ways that employers could support or contribute to vocational education. Respondents were asked to describe their company's current or

future participation in these activities. Nearly nine or of every ten employers indicated a willingness to make some type of contribution by using their company's resources to support vocational education. This means that only about 10 percent of the respondents indicated little or no interest in contributing to vocational education or in increasing their current levels of activity. This finding is very positive and indicates the opportunity for continued growth in business-vocational education partnerships. The challenge appears to be identifying how the employer may be effectively utilized given a company's resources, unique interests and availability.

Again, the favorable responses - those answers which may be considered positive ("would definitely participate in," "would consider participating in," and "already participating in") were grouped together for analytical purposes. At least 70 percent of the respondents noted six activities which they would consider participating in:

- Serving on a local committee in the review of vocational education programs (89%);
- Conducting plant tours (77%);
- Taking part in a work/study or cooperative education program (75%);
- Providing support for a vocational education event such as job skill contests (71%);
- Providing loaned executives or instructors (71); and
- Serving on a state committee to help educators develop state policy (70%).

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were already participating in one or more of these activities at the time they completed the questionnaire. And, one out of every four respondents' firms appeared to be significantly active in vocational education, participating in at least five of the fourteen activities listed. Those activities where employers were noted as being the most active were: serving on a local committee (29%), conducting plant tours (28%), providing student training through apprenticeship agreements (27%), and taking part in work/study or cooperative education programs(25%).

Furthermore, more than half of the respondents indicated a willingness to consider participating in each activity that was listed in the survey form. There were, of course, some activities that respondents ranked lower than others. The four bottom ranked activities included: entering into a staff exchange program with the local school system (47% would not consider participating in this activity); providing summer employment opportunities for vocational education teachers (40% would not consider participating); offering awards/scholarships to students or teachers for outstanding achievements (39% would not consider participating); and providing supplies and equipment for use in classroom training instruction (35% would not consider participating). Presumably, these activities are seen as involving a greater investment of money or commitment of time from the employer than the other activities listed.

### III. Employer Experience with Vocational Education as a Source of Recruitment and Training

In two open-ended questions, employers were asked to discuss their utilization /non-utilization of the vocational education system as a source for recruitment and training. When asked if their firms recruited employees from public schools, community colleges, and/or private trade schools, two-thirds of the respondents replied affirmatively. Survey respondents were asked to detail the types of jobs they had recruited for through the vocational education system. Because the question was completely open-ended, the responses varied considerably; however, the following types were listed the most frequently: machinist (27%); clerk,secretary, word processor (24%);data processor, computer programmer, computer operator (14%); electronic technician (11%); drafters, designers (7%); and tool maker apprentice(7%).

Of those respondents who indicated that they did not use the vocational education system for recruiting new employees, the lack of hiring on the part of the company, insufficient training provided to graduates of vocational education programs, and and the ready supply of experienced workers from which the company could draw were the major reasons cited for not using the publicly-funded system. Specifically,

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- One out of every four employers who did not recruit through vocational education said it was because their company was so small or new that additional workers were not being hired. Also, in several cases, respondents indicated that the company had recently experienced an economic downturn and no new workers were seen as being required by the firm.
- One out of five employers who did not recruit from vocational educational entities indicated that they felt that the training received by the participants was inadequate -- either in general or for the company's specific needs.
- One out of ten of the respondents said that graduates of the vocational education system did not meet their needs since they required or preferred workers with experience. In a number of cases, the respondents added that since there was an excess of experienced workers in the labor force, they saw no reason to recruit workers with no or limited experience.

Additional reasons provided for a company's lack of using the vocational education schools for recruiting new workers included: union contracts and lack of information about area educational institution.

It should be noted that a number of those respondents who indicated that they did not currently use the vocational education system as a source for recruiting new employees, noted they they would be willing to recruit through it when the company was in a hiring mode. Furthermore, many of the employers indicated a willingness to support vocational education programs and stay in contact with the schools, even though the company itself was unable to hire vocational education graduates.

In a negative vein, several employers mentioned that their concern about the attitude and expectations of vocational education trainees prevented their looking to vocational educational institutions as a possible recruitment source. Some of the respondents said that they believed that vocational education trainees had unrealistic or negative attitudes or expected too high of a salary. Others indicated that their failure to take advantage of the vocational education system resulted from the fact that the local institution seemed uncooperative. In some cases, it had previously turned down an employer's request for help in recruiting new workers.

#### IV. Employer experience with vocational education as a source of training

Respondents indicated that their companies turned to vocational educational as a source of training for their employees somewhat less frequently than they utilized the system for the recruitment of new workers. Over half of the respondents (57%) said that they have some type of arrangement with local vocational education institutions to provide training to some of the firm's staff. Employers were asked to describe their use of vocational education to provide training. Most commonly, employers used vocational education for occupationally specific or technical training. Using the vocational education network to provide classroom theory to meet apprenticeship requirements, supervisory management training, general workplace training, upgrading, and basic skills remediation were cited less frequently by the respondents.

Community colleges were the most frequently cited vocational education entity used to provide training. Other training providers - listed in descending order of frequency - were vocational-technical institutes and public high schools. Occasionally, employers noted that they provided educational assistance for employees taking work-related courses; and several indicated that

- Forty-three percent of the employers completing the survey indicated that they did not use vocational education for training. Reasons attributed for the non-utilization of the system for training were fairly evenly divided among four factors:
- The employer has an internal capacity to deliver training and does not need outside providers.
- The employer does not believe that the training provided by the vocational education system is adequate or that it would be appropriate to meet the company's needs.
- The employer is not aware of what activities and services that the vocational educational system can provide and/or he has never been approached by a representative of an educational institution.
- The employer does not have a need at this time for any of the services available through the local vocational education network (e.g., company is too small, too new, or is experiencing economic problems).

Other reasons provided somewhat less frequently for a firm's not using the vocational education system included: a lack of interest by the employees in taking the training, discontinuation of training due union contract, logistical problems, and the perception that the needed training is not available in area schools and institutions.

The data indicates when employers do not avail themselves of vocational education services, it is most frequently due to the company's lack of need for the services or general lack of knowledge about the program rather than the firm's reservations about the quality of training provided to participants in vocational education programs. In only approximately one of five situations, did the the respondent indicate concerns about the quality or applicability of the training as the primary reason for not choosing the educational institutions supported by vocational educational funds as a source for recruiting future employees or training those presently employed by the company.

1. Vocational education offers a wide range of programs for its students and for employers. Many of these programs may be a useful resource for your business. Please check the appropriate blank which describes your level of interest or use of the following vocational education activities or programs:

|                                                                                                            | <u>Very<br/>Interested</u> | <u>Somewhat<br/>Interested</u> | <u>Currently<br/>Using</u> | <u>Not Interested/<br/>Not Relevant</u> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| a. skill training for a specific occupational area offered at a vocational education institution           | <u>38%</u>                 | <u>28.5%</u>                   | <u>27.5%</u>               | <u>6%</u>                               |
| b. training designed for your company and offered at your site                                             | <u>16%</u>                 | <u>40%</u>                     | <u>15%</u>                 | <u>30%</u>                              |
| c. skill training for expansion or relocation                                                              | <u>8%</u>                  | <u>28%</u>                     | <u>7%</u>                  | <u>57%</u>                              |
| d. training in high-demand occupations                                                                     | <u>25%</u>                 | <u>34%</u>                     | <u>11%</u>                 | <u>30%</u>                              |
| e. vocational training for employees to upgrade skills, produce new products or offer new services         | <u>22%</u>                 | <u>39%</u>                     | <u>17%</u>                 | <u>22%</u>                              |
| f. training to improve managers' supervisory techniques                                                    | <u>28%</u>                 | <u>32%</u>                     | <u>14%</u>                 | <u>26%</u>                              |
| g. recruitment of qualified permanent personnel for your labor force                                       | <u>30%</u>                 | <u>30%</u>                     | <u>21%</u>                 | <u>19%</u>                              |
| h. referral of part-time employees who are enrolled in a local work-study or cooperative education program | <u>15%</u>                 | <u>33%</u>                     | <u>21%</u>                 | <u>31%</u>                              |
| i. basic skill education (reading, math, science, communication) for employees                             | <u>17%</u>                 | <u>29%</u>                     | <u>15%</u>                 | <u>39%</u>                              |
| j. specialized training to meet federal and state licensing requirements                                   | <u>6%</u>                  | <u>21%</u>                     | <u>10%</u>                 | <u>63%</u>                              |
| k. business management assistance                                                                          | <u>11%</u>                 | <u>25%</u>                     | <u>4%</u>                  | <u>60%</u>                              |
| l. counseling to help employees adjust to new production techniques or requirements                        | <u>8%</u>                  | <u>24%</u>                     | <u>7%</u>                  | <u>61%</u>                              |
| m. training to provide students with understanding of private enterprise                                   | <u>22%</u>                 | <u>33%</u>                     | <u>7%</u>                  | <u>38%</u>                              |
| n. support or implement new or existing industry apprenticeship training                                   | <u>23%</u>                 | <u>32%</u>                     | <u>13%</u>                 | <u>32%</u>                              |

- 2 To provide relevant and timely training, vocational education needs employer participation. Please check the categories which best describe how your company could work with vocational education programs:

|                                                                                                                                     | <u>Would<br/>Definitely<br/>Participate</u> | <u>Would<br/>Consider<br/>Participating</u> | <u>Already<br/>Participating<br/>In</u> | <u>Not Relevant<br/>or Interested<br/>in Participating</u> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. serve on local committee to review vocational education programs (known as Vocational Instructional Program Advisory Committees) | <u>17%</u>                                  | <u>42%</u>                                  | <u>29%</u>                              | <u>12%</u>                                                 |
| b. provide summer employment for vocational education teachers                                                                      | <u>3%</u>                                   | <u>46%</u>                                  | <u>11%</u>                              | <u>40%</u>                                                 |
| c. provide supplies and equipment for use in classroom instruction                                                                  | <u>5%</u>                                   | <u>37%</u>                                  | <u>21%</u>                              | <u>35%</u>                                                 |
| d. provide loaned instructors or executives for vocational education programs                                                       | <u>6%</u>                                   | <u>48%</u>                                  | <u>17%</u>                              | <u>29%</u>                                                 |
| e. make available company facilities for on-site training                                                                           | <u>6%</u>                                   | <u>43%</u>                                  | <u>13%</u>                              | <u>38%</u>                                                 |
| f. offer awards/scholarships to students/teachers for outstanding achievements                                                      | <u>4%</u>                                   | <u>40%</u>                                  | <u>17%</u>                              | <u>31%</u>                                                 |
| g. provide student training through apprenticeship programs                                                                         | <u>8%</u>                                   | <u>36%</u>                                  | <u>27%</u>                              | <u>29%</u>                                                 |
| h. serve on state committees to help educators develop state-wide vocational education policy                                       | <u>15%</u>                                  | <u>44%</u>                                  | <u>11%</u>                              | <u>30%</u>                                                 |
| i. take part in a work-study or cooperative education program                                                                       | <u>6%</u>                                   | <u>44%</u>                                  | <u>25%</u>                              | <u>25%</u>                                                 |
| j. conduct plant tours                                                                                                              | <u>16%</u>                                  | <u>34%</u>                                  | <u>28%</u>                              | <u>23%</u>                                                 |
| k. engage in promotional activities on behalf of vocational education                                                               | <u>9%</u>                                   | <u>48%</u>                                  | <u>14%</u>                              | <u>29%</u>                                                 |
| l. enter into staff exchange program between your company and local school system                                                   | <u>6%</u>                                   | <u>36%</u>                                  | <u>11%</u>                              | <u>47%</u>                                                 |
| m. furnish curriculum or teacher updates for vocational education programs                                                          | <u>8%</u>                                   | <u>47%</u>                                  | <u>12%</u>                              | <u>33%</u>                                                 |
| n. provide support (judges, sponsorship, banquet, etc.) for job skill contests                                                      | <u>7%</u>                                   | <u>51%</u>                                  | <u>17%</u>                              | <u>25%</u>                                                 |

3. Do you actively recruit for employees from the vocational training programs offered through local school systems, community colleges or private trade schools? If yes, for what jobs? If no, why not?

66% - DO RECRUIT FROM VOC ED Programs  
34% - DO NOT

4. Have you used a vocational education program in your community to provide training or related services to your employees and your company? If yes, please provide details. If no, why not?

57% Use Vocational Training to Provide Training  
43% DO NOT

5. Please describe the major activity of your business and the approximate total of employees (nationally) during the last 12 months -

Major Activity (check only one)

|                                 |            |                                         |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------------|------------|
| Agriculture                     | <u>2%</u>  | Mining-extractive                       | <u>1%</u>  |
| Construction                    | <u>4%</u>  | Retail trade wholesale                  | <u>7%</u>  |
| Finance, insurance, real estate | <u>6%</u>  | Service                                 | <u>14%</u> |
| Manufacturing                   | <u>55%</u> | Transportation-communications utilities | <u>8%</u>  |
|                                 |            | Other (please specify)                  | <u>4%</u>  |

Total Number of Employees

|           |            |               |            |
|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 - 9     | <u>14%</u> | 500 - 999     | <u>2%</u>  |
| 10 - 49   | <u>25%</u> | 1,000 - 4,999 | <u>10%</u> |
| 50 - 99   | <u>10%</u> | 5,000 - 9,999 | <u>6%</u>  |
| 100 - 499 | <u>14%</u> | over 10,000   | <u>16%</u> |

6. In order to link the State Director of Vocational Education with your organization, please complete the following:

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_